

**CHINATOWN/LEATHER DISTRICT CENTRAL ARTERY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MEETING SUMMARY – PARCEL 24, MEETING #5, OCTOBER 14, 2003  
ST. JAMES CHURCH, 125 HARRISON AVE., CHINATOWN**

Stephanie Fan, Co-chair of the Chinatown/ Leather District Central Artery Advisory Committee, welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief overview of the past meetings. She summarized general consensus around concepts such as affordable housing, open space, community space, and different types of housing. She briefly recapped that there are a variety of affordable housing subsidies potentially available that were presented in the last meeting. Fan stated that there was a question in the July meeting regarding the demographics of Chinatown. The BRA's Research Department prepared a summary of Chinatown's demographics from the 2000 Census for the August meeting. Copies of the summary are available upon request.

Fan introduced City Councilor Maura Hennigan, who shared her support of the community process occurring. Hennigan understood the neighborhoods' desire to see the land be developed in a way that was best for the community and indicated her support of the legislation regarding this parcel.

Fan introduced Yan Gao, Urban Designer at the BRA, to discuss some massing, density, and design concepts. Gao presented three different massing scenarios based on some of the numbers they had talked about in the past meeting. She stated clearly that these were only possible scenarios and not actual proposals. She summarized general design principles discussed at past meetings, talked about her assumption of using 950 S.F. per unit, and presented the designs for 200-, 300-, and 400-unit developments (see attachment). Her PowerPoint presentation (available upon request) included the units/ floors per each building, community/retail use, open space, and parking elements. She also presented aerial, 360 degree, and street level views for each.

Bruce Ehrlich from the BRA also added that based on the previous meetings' conversations about subsidies, it should be noted that the option with 400 units (two towers) would likely yield the highest market rate units (higher level/view equals higher value), and therefore the more internal subsidy for affordability.

**Questions and Answers:**

- Which scenarios are the best from an urban design standpoint? How much input came from the community to shape these concepts? (Bob Kroin, BRA Chief Architect: this is the first presentation of alternatives – not recommendations – to the community for discussion. These scenarios are to elicit discussion to help in develop design guidelines. The BRA was asked to develop designs similar in concept to make comparison easier for the community members.)
- How much will the traffic and congestion impact differ in the 200- 400 unit scenarios? (Generally, more units imply more cars, though that does not necessarily mean dramatic traffic and congestion impacts. Other downtown projects have shown that most residents will be walking or taking public transit to work, and most congestion will occur on weekends. Also, it should be kept in mind that residential spaces will facilitate faster movement than public parking.)
- What is the BRA's vision of this area – a mixed-use area or one for non-profits or free market? (Kroin: from an urban design perspective, there is no preference.)

Participants were reminded that this meeting was intended to focus on design, density, and massing elements rather than affordability, which will be further discussed at the next meeting. While the presentation showed only one set of scenarios, the goal is to create guidelines for prospective developers. This particular meeting intended to be a discussion on massing, while specifics such as entrance/exit locations of the garage will be discussed later.

Henry Yee reiterated comments from previous meetings stating the need to emphasize the affordable housing aspect. This parcel is different than others because this once belonged to Chinatown and should be given back to the community.

Questions:

- Could the BRA and Massachusetts Turnpike Authority supply a timeline of the process to help the community focus the discussion? (Topics for meetings are shared in advance of the meetings. The process is evolving and the community wants to be involved in that evolutionary process. There is a rough idea of the topics to be covered; tonight is design; next will be to discuss the draft guidelines. Schedules that are too specific will undoubtedly change since the process evolves based on community response.)
- What are the next big milestones? (Bill Tuttle, MTA: Following final design and use guidelines will be review of a draft RFP document with the design guidelines incorporated into it.)

A general question was asked about understanding what the trade-offs are for massing vs. affordable housing. Specifically, is it better to have bigger buildings with more affordable housing? Some meeting participants suggested the possibility of more overall units to increase the number of affordable units. Other meeting participants responded that at the September meeting, Sam Yoon (Asian CDC) gave a summary of the recent design forum held by the Hudson St. Coalition. Fifty people attended and built models – mostly everyone ended up building 3 and 4 story buildings with 250-300 units. The goal was not to over-story the current townhouses, located across the street. The scenarios presented are all bigger than those across the street.

Questions:

- What would be the shadow, wind, and other environmental impacts, i.e., the canyon effect? (The scenarios shown tonight also show the general idea of where shadows would fall, with not much new shadow on existing buildings. [Since the higher building massing is located towards the northern end of the parcel, and the lower part towards Tai Tung Street, the building massing south of Harvard Street shouldn't cast too much shadow on the townhouses across Hudson Street. The three renderings looking from Hudson Street show that in the summer time, very little shadow is projected on Hudson Street. The effects of winter time shadow would need to be tested. As Tufts University expands in the future on Parcel R-1 with a zoned height up to 125' and FAR of 8, the building massing north of Harvard Street and south of Kneeland Street roughly reflects the same height and density as well.](#) As shown on the physical model – at the meeting – the canyon effect would not be as prominent as it is in other parts of Chinatown.)
- What will be built on the temporary parking lot across from the site? (It is unknown what Tufts has planned, but there is zoning on the site. On the physical model is their newest building.)

Comments:

- A bigger project could be preferable since it would provide more housing for people in one project, 450 units could provide more affordable units with developers more likely to want to develop the project.
- Chinatown seems to always have to deal with tradeoffs that require taller buildings to get more housing. How many more affordable units are we actually getting with the higher buildings? The trade-offs are not reasonable because the quality of life in the neighborhood is compromised. A smaller project that maximizes its subsidies could be preferred.
- There is a need for larger unit sizes for families – the wait-lists are very lengthy at existing housing. (Ehrlich commented that sizes are flexible, though there needs to be evidence of actual demand- more research and more information from residents is needed.)
- There are also a lot of overcrowded units, and those looking for larger units have left the neighborhood.

Sue Kim, BRA, asked whether it is the number of bedrooms or the square footage size of the unit that is more important to people because the same square footage could be a one or a two bedroom. As an example, Oak Terrace's 2-bedrooms are roughly 880 SF., while Tai Tung's 2-bedrooms are around 660 SF. Gao's assumption was 950 [net SF](#) for a 2-bedroom ([approximately 1,120 gross SF](#)), which could also be a small 3-bedroom unit.

Fan commented on the need to keep a balance, because it has been mentioned that there are a lot of students in the area, and if we build too many three and fours they are likely to rent those as well.

Questions:

- What research can be done around the issue of numbers of bedrooms and sizes of units? (Ehrlich replied that waiting lists and calls to recent projects is a place to start.)
- How do you define need if a lot of 3BR don't exist? (We need to find the right sample.)
- Is there a way to incrementally guess a range of how many more affordable units we will get between these scenarios of 200-400? Also, what is the future of the South Bay area? (Ehrlich: There is an approximate range, but using external subsidies it is approximately 140 units whether the total unit count is 200 or 400. The major variance comes with internal subsidies, which are derived by the market rate units. With a lower-rise building, the internal subsidy could be up to 15-20% subsidized, which in the 200 scheme is approximately 20-40 units. In the 400- unit scenario with the towers and the views, the internal subsidies could be up to 30-50% subsidized. A potential scenario could keep mostly low-rise buildings and do one large tower.)

Ehrlich reminded members that this shouldn't be compared to Parcel C, which was 45% affordable. A portion of the internal subsidies were needed for the community space. Without the community space, the percentage affordability would have been higher. Parcel 24 would not have enough retail space to have a big effect. If the space, however, is given away as community space, there will be an impact on the percentage of affordable units.

Kroin commented that the alternatives presented here are good urban designs that take into account the compromises of the highway ramp and other factors that have been discussed. [He asked whether the group would like to see other alternatives that maximize affordability and not urban design elements, which participants thought would be helpful. The next version of massing scenarios will also include affordable housing scenarios.](#)

Tuttle stated that existing zoning allows for 300-350 units, and if affordable housing is the goal, then smaller options may not meet that goal. Also, historic guidelines allow for building heights along Hudson St. to maintain up to 75'. He again reiterated that the second/third floors of buildings along Albany St. will be looking at the highway ramp due to the rise in topography.

Questions:

- If the overriding principle is affordability, would the aesthetics be sacrificed? (Kroin: This process is not at that stage yet to discuss design; it is still a discussion about massing.)
- Will the community usage be defined in the RFP? (Tuttle: It will be presented as guidelines. If specifics are elicited, then they can be incorporated. More than likely it will be general guidelines.)

Fan concluded the meeting by thanking everyone and stating that the next meeting will present more alternative designs, rather than a review of guidelines. There will be coordination with the Hudson St. Coalition to review the outcomes from their forum. It was also requested that specifics around the highway ramp be discussed.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Monday, November 10<sup>th</sup>.

*(The next meeting will be on Monday, November 24, 2003, at 6:00 PM at St. James Church, 125 Harrison Ave.)*